

## Plant Winter Annuals for Winter Color

One advantage of our climate is that we can have bright, colorful flowers in our gardens all winter long. Typically, late October is a good time to prepare for planting winter flowers, as temperatures start decreasing following hot summer weather. You'll need to plant when daily temperatures are below 100 degrees consistently, so prepare your flower beds up to two weeks before planting.

Soil preparation is essential to growing winter annuals successfully. Make sure your planting bed is well drained and your soil can support the needs of your new flowers. You can add mulch, usually available at a home improvement store, and spread a 4 inch layer over the soil, mixing the mulch into a depth of 12 inches. This is the time to add a fertilizer or sulfur as well if needed. Always follow the directions for your chosen products.



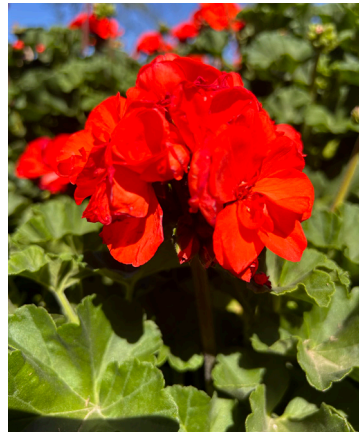
Yellow & purple Pansies, Calendulas, and Snapdragons

Once your soil is ready, it's time to choose which flower varieties you want to plant. Some types that grow well in low desert winters include Calendulas, Geraniums, Pansies, and Petunias. Sweet Alyssum and Lobelia make great borders around the edge of your flower beds!

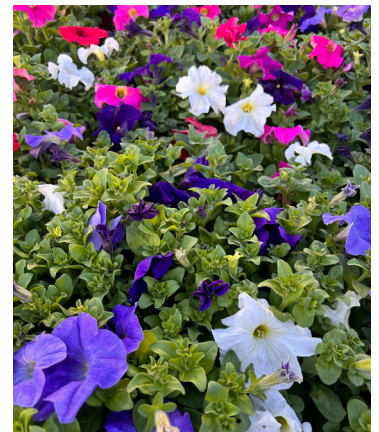
At the nursery, select the healthiest plants you can find. Younger, more-compact plants are generally better than tall, leggy plants that have already spent a long time in the container. Choose flowers that are suitable for the sun exposure that your flower bed receives; different types thrive in full sun, partial sun, or constant shade. And please note that stores often mark down flower prices after their season. Check to make sure you are buying plants that will survive the winter.

Now you're ready to plant. Water the bed well and allow it to drain prior to planting so that the soil is still moist but not saturated. Do not plant too deep! The flower stems should be at the same depth in the bed as they were in the container. You could carefully open the sides of the root ball with your fingers to promote quicker root growth into the soil of the bed. Water the bed immediately after planting and continue to water daily. In particularly sunny spots, you can water more often as long as temperatures are up. As temperatures decrease throughout the winter, reduce water accordingly.

To help your flower bed thrive all season, it's best to fertilize monthly with ammonium phosphate. Also, you'll need to "deadhead" the flowers as blossoms fade. Simply pinch the faded blossom off the stem right at the base of the flower. This keeps your flower bed looking fresh and promotes the growth of new blossoms.



Geraniums



Petunias

